

TRAJECTORIES OF RELIGIOUS FAITH IN LIFE PERSPECTIVE

Joana Butėnaitė

Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania, e-mail: joana.but@gmail.com

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Abstract

Purpose is to reveal the trajectories of religious faith in the lives of older people.

Methodology is a qualitative study that has involved seven older people. Data was collected in qualitative semi-structured interviews using *Faith Development Interview* (Streib & Keller, 2015), questions about sociodemographic characteristics of participants, observation and diary of the researcher. The study applied thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005) which consisted of the steps to reconstruct the life stories (Rosenthal, 1993) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings. The origins of religious faith formed in childhood, but had different trajectories in the course of life: a stable or wavy religious faith, manifested as hidden or rediscovered. Stable religious faith is a constant, little-changing belief in the lives of the older people. Wavy religious faith is a fragmentary belief and its changing meaning in life. At a certain stage of life, it may appear as neglected, hidden or rediscovered religious faith.

Research limitations / implications are the low number of participants. For this reason, the results of the study do not describe and generalize a larger population of the older people, but provide insights for further research. It is expedient to conduct longitudinal studies that reveal how religious faith develops in the course of life.

Practical implications. A valuable specialist in various fields working with these individuals in the institutions of social services, long-term care, and education, in associations for senior people and alliances. The findings of the study are adapted and integrated into consulting, psychotherapy and psychosocial and spiritual interventions of the elderly.

Originality. The presented perspectives of elderly people reflect the culture of Eastern Europe and Lithuania, where in the context of historical events and Catholic tradition were the older people and their religious faith have formed. There is a lack of such religious faith in historical and cultural environment of Lithuania.

Keywords: religious faith, elderly, life course.

Research type: case study.

JEL classification: D91, N34, Z12.

Introduction

The religious faith of the older people in their life perspective, integrating spirituality, religion, and faith, is the subject of this article. This investigation area is multidisciplinary, which is proposed to be studied by integrating the knowledge of theology, philosophy, education, and psychology (Kontrimienė, 2018). Lithuanian scientific psychological literature focuses on attitudes towards suicide and their relation to religion (Gailiene, 1998; Mockus, 2006; Kucavičiūtė, Pileckaitė-Markovienė, & Skruibis, 2013). Relationships between religious beliefs, inner harmony and prosperity have been studied (Diržytė, Patapas, & Limantaitė, 2003). Religious faith in the field of education is analyzed at different age stages in the context of education (Jovaiša, 2008); relation

of the family as a value to the practiced Catholic faith (Ralys & Burvytė, 2012). The reviewed surveys include a sample of students or younger people (up to 60) (Mockus, 2006; Kucavičiūtė, Pileckaitė-Markovienė, & Skruibis, 2013; Diržytė, Patapas, & Limantaitė, 2003; Kontrimienė, 2018). The significance of spirituality was revealed in the traumatic experiences of repressed Latvians (Vidnere, 2011) and Lithuanians (Gailienė, 2008). The effect of spirituality and religiosity on the physical and mental health of older people is recognized (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Musick, Traphagan, Koenig, & Larson, 2000; Oman & Lukoff, 2018; Parchment, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004). Older people belonging to religious institutions are less likely to apply for their mental health care (Ng, Nyunt, Chiam, & Kua, 2011) and apply spirituality and religion as a strategy to overcome difficult situations (Shaw, Gullifer, & Wood, 2016). They may become religious, facing physical and psychological difficulties (Payman, George, & Ryburn, 2008). Quantitative and cross-sectional studies are often used in these studies, so it is suggested to use methods that analyze the evolution of spirituality and religiosity in the course of life (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Qualitative research on the religiosity and spirituality of older people has been conducted in other cultures: Australia (Shaw, Gullifer, & Wood, 2016), India (Mukherjee, 2016), Brazil (Oliveira & Menezes, 2018), Czech Republic (Suchomelová, 2016). Investigation on the spirituality, religion and faith of the elderly is highly fragmented, dependent on the cultural and historical context, and therefore it makes sense to fill the gap in this study of religious faith with the elderly in Lithuania. In Lithuanian psychology literature, there is not found a research on religious faith of older people. There is a lack of understanding of religious faith among older people in our historical and cultural context. Most researches about religiosity, spirituality and faith are conducted in accordance with the quantitative research paradigm and focus on the experience of religiosity and spirituality in childhood, adolescence or young adulthood. Although religious faith is a task for the development of life (Lavretsky, 2010), there is a lack of study of the faith of older people in their life course which would disclose the trajectories of religious faith. For that reason the goal of this study is to reveal the trajectories of religious faith of older people, practicing Catholics faith in their course of life.

1. Theoretical background

Religious faith is defined as a personal position in a religious context (Wyatt, 2004), derived from existential need and comprised of components: spirituality, religiosity, and faith, in this article (Figure 1). Spirituality, religiosity, and faith are overlapping and confusing concepts in scientific literature. This illustrates the lack of integration of these concepts. Therefore, it is proposed to solve this question in this work by defining concepts and presenting the model of integration of religious faith.



Source: created by author

Figure 1. Concept of religious faith

Religious faith is a narrower concept that integrates the concepts of these concepts:

- *Spirituality is a "sphere of experience that involves an intense understanding of the present, the personal overriding, the sense of connection with life, the universe, or the Supreme Being" (Atchley, 2009, p. 2) , others and the reality of being "(Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 37); "experience of meaning and purpose in life and integration through communication with oneself, others, art, nature or superior power" (Burkhart & Solari-Twadell, 2001, p. 49).*
- *Religiosity is described as "specific qualities of behavior, social, doctrinal religion that express faith in God" (Huguelet & Koenig, 2009, p. 1); "common institutional values and beliefs about God, involvement in the religious community" (Wolf & Stevens, 2001, p. 67); "a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 44).*
- *Faith is "personality orientation to oneself, a close person, the universe" (McDargh, 2001, p. 188); "active self-realization of oneself, other people, and transcendence according to their knowledge and values" (Tam, 1996, p. 253), having the capacity to develop (Fowler, 1981; Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004; Oakes, 2000).*

These concepts are different, overlapping, and integrated into a religious faith that emphasizes the essential aspects of these concepts. Religious faith comes from an existential need that unites the spirituality, religion, and faith of a person. The concept of spirituality is fundamental because it is formed by personal experience of present, relationship, life, transcendence; meaning and purpose in life experiences and their integration. Meanwhile, religiosity is a natural or formal manifestation of

spirituality, which manifests itself as a cultural and / or personal phenomenon through specific qualities of behavior, social and doctrinal institution or confession, reflecting common values, the system of beliefs and practices. As it involves the inner experience, feelings and motivation of the person, it can become a personal religion. A person's faith that comes from spirituality and has a tendency to develop expresses religiosity. Religiosity can become personal through faith. At the same time, faith is a process how a person orientates and makes sense of himself, relationships, life and transcendence according to his values.

From the perspective of the evolution of faith, faith has the capacity to develop (Fowler, 1981; Ruemke, 1962; Trimakas, 1974). C. Ruemke (1962) examines the development of faith in a maturing individual. Faith is a two-person relationship, and its development is the discovery of a person in relation to God (Trimakas, 1998). In the first three stages, intuition prevails, and experience is associated with the experience of God followed by devotion in the fourth stage (Ruemke, 1962). A. Trimakas (1974, 1998), reviewing the attitude of psychologists towards faith, states that faith is not a state, but a process because the person is constantly becoming. This process is called *coming to believe*, when the human faith is strengthened, and *coming out of believe* when the faith weakens (Trimakas, 1974). The following powers are active in the process of coming to believe: intuitive (primary feeling-perception that God is); rational (understanding, evaluating, and formation of the worldview); will (aspiration and motivation). An intuitive power with constant willpower and rational evaluation plays a significant role in coming to believe. There are two aspects of coming to believe, i.e., feeling the sense of God: recognition and devotion. Coming to believe has a deep personality in life, and devotion develops even deeper personality. The more the person matures, the more he is guided by his consciousness (Trimakas, 1974). These aspects of coming to believe require a mental and moral maturity of the person (Trimakas, 1974). J. W. Fowler (1981) the theory of the development of faith is based on a cognitive and psychosocial approach to human development. Faith is reflected in the "*triangular relationship*", i.e., the person's relationship with someone with whom he shares values and powers (Trimakas, 1998, p. 21). This theory is unique as it encompasses the entire human life through the stages of the evolution of faith that take place alongside cognitive, intellectual, and moral development.

Further personal development and adaptation take place in the later age. Psychologists who were interested in a person's development in the course of life emphasize the evolution of human life to the old age and aging as a period of growth and vitality. C.G. Jung (1999) expanded the understanding of life development by emphasizing the second half of life, which begins the process of individualization, characterized by increased self-esteem, higher spiritual purposes and the resolution of inner conflicts. It is a natural part of puberty from the middle age to later life. A person must be able to "*descend from the peak of his life*" with the help of individualization and

transcendence to discover his own self: (Jung, 1999, p. 178). Religious faith as a way of solving internal conflicts, avoiding neurosis and accepting death is of particular importance (Jung, 1999). Older people with a strong system of values are better prepared to deal with mortality and life issues than those without the basis of these values (Shaw, Gullifer, & Wood, 2016). E. Erikson (2004) the psychosocial development continues to the old age through eight life stages and related crises. The transition to the next stage is determined by internal psychological development and expectations of the social environment. In the midst of life, having perceived its mortality and the issues of the meaning of life, man is experiencing a crisis of productivity and stagnation. From the perspective of this theory, old age is the solution of all eight crises, the acceptance and giving sense of all life experiences. In an older age that extends to death, he is experiencing a crisis of integrity or despair. Having solved this crisis positively, a person becomes united, behaves wisely, is not afraid of his loneliness and death (Erikson, 2004). An older person can achieve integrity and reconciliation through his life review (Bühler, 1968).

2. Methodology

Qualitative research is applied in this work; it is intended to analyze new and little researched phenomena and to reveal individual thoughts, feelings, meanings, and process (Given, 2008). Most studies on older people and aging show that the subjective, everyday, and moral experience of an older person remains invisible and unrecognized (Zeman & Zeman, 2015). When analyzing people's experiences, it makes sense to consider the context and social relationships of their lives (Biggerstaff, 2012). In this study, older people are understood as narrators because they think, feel, and behave on their own stories. They are biographical beings (Kenyon & Randall, 1999). The strategy of this study is a case study, which in the context of qualitative research highlights the deep analysis of the individual phenomenon in the natural environment, according to the viewpoints of the study participants (Kardelis, 2002) and prefers the depth, detail and context of the data rather than representativeness (Given, 2008). It was chosen because of the historical and cultural similarity of the participants. Elderly practicing Catholics are the participants of the study. A small sample of study participants is used in the study. The results of the study can not be summarized for the whole population of the elderly, but it can serve as prospective studies for future suggestions or insights. The usual environment and an intelligible language were used to communicate with participants of the study.

The participants of the study were selected by non-probability target sampling. The main selection criteria were: 60-90 years old, religion - Roman Catholics, good mental health, i.e., able to speak clearly and reflect on their experiences. Seven older people (five women and two men) were interviewed; their age ranged from 63 to 88 years. They are unemployed old-age pensioners.

Participants were found independently or through the third parties and invited to participate in the study; they had contact with the investigator or participants. The study was carried out at the home of the study participants, the home yard or the monastery premises. The meeting with each participant took about 2-2.5 hours. The interviews were recorded, then transcribed and analyzed.

The fundamental ethical principles were followed during the study; the participants were informed about the consent of participation in the study, security of confidentiality and anonymity without compromising the study participants, and the right to withdraw from the study (Willig, 2013). The names of the investigation participants have been changed to popular names of older people, and all the information that identifies participants was changed or not published at all. The initiative to protect mental health and dignity of the participants of the study from any damage or loss was taken. In order to ensure the quality of this qualitative research, the following qualitative research evaluation criteria were applied: researcher's perspective, selection of research participants, quotation of authentic material from interview, consistent presentation of research and fulfillment of set goals, verification of results reliability (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). The results of the study were discussed with two independent researchers.

Data were collected in qualitative semi-structured interviews. The asked questions were based on faith development interview (Streib & Keller, 2015), additional questions about sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (age, education, social status and possession of children), diary of the researcher and observation were applied there also. The investigator's remarks on the participants of the study based on observation during the interview and analysis of research data were marked in investigator's diary. This method allows a better understanding of the significance of the phenomenon being studied, the assumptions made, and to disclose the reactions and speeches of the study participants from their perspective and life context (Cassell & Symon, 2004).

Narrative analysis was carried out in order to investigate religious faith in the life stories of older people, which were reconstructed from the stories of the participants themselves. The objective was to analyze biographical data and reconstruct the history of life by presenting the most important stages of life, events and relationships that formed the religious faith of the elderly. The study applied thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005). Narrative analysis consisted of the following steps (Rosenthal, 1993):

1. *Familiarisation with the survey participants' interview data.* Data are read carefully and carefully several times. The thoughts about the participants of the study and their history are noted.
2. *Analysis of objective facts and biographical data.* Objective facts and biographical data in life history are distinguished, recorded and chronologically arranged

3. *Reconstruction of life history.* The story of life is reconstructed, taking into account the sequence of objective biographical data and life experiences. The main topics that formed the religious faith of the elderly in the course of life were distinguished by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006): source codes were created, relevant themes were searched, themes were reviewed, defining and naming them.

4. *Every life story and its context are reviewed and considered.* The researcher notes the following insights: the distinguishment of life story and the essence of religious faith to a person.

5. *Life stories are comparable to each other.* The Selected themes and sub-themes that best illustrate the religious faith of the research participants in their course of life are summarized.

6. *The report is prepared.* Themes and sub-themes are presented and illustrated by the participants; the impact of historical and personal events on the religious faith of the study participants is presented.

3. Research findings

After analyzing the stories of the elderly, the main themes of religious faith in childhood and life were distinguished. During the narrative analysis, it was found that all the participants of the study had a faith in childhood, fostered by their parents and teachers, nuns, priests with whom their relatives interacted. The basis of religious faith in older people lies in childhood:

I probably took [a prayer] over from childhood. [...] From birth“ [Petras];

“Such was the order [...] We had to listen to the mass, we had to have all fast. [...] I was seven at that time. (Silence) The church was eight kilometers from our residence. [...] Usually we all went there, one at home stayed with animals. [...] Not only Sunday was sacred, but also the first Friday“ [Ona];

“From childhood we saw what our parents did. [...] The priests were taken to prison for faith. So the knowledge was very modest, [...] that knowledge was initial“ [Stefa];

“All the time and May devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary [...] from childhood, from youth“ [Morta].

Ona was educated through religious practices and education in the family, community, and school. Her faith was formed by a family belonging to the Third Order of Saint Francis, priests, Catholic Lithuanian literature and school: *“Well, of course, our entire family was the third order believers...”; “Our family was devoted to Jesus' heart during the great holidays.”* Her father's example was particularly impressive: *“The real example was just a dad. Family only. [...] (silence, brought pictures). [...] [Current children] don't want to go to church. There were no such thoughts here with us. There was no such thought. So when Sunday morning comes, everyone knows what to do and [...] it is festival, it is Sunday. [...] It happened that the priests did not come“ [Ona].* Anelė

took over from her parents the viewpoint about the church: „*mother and father were not away from the church. [...] We went at the church every time [to the church] [...] on Sundays all the time*“. Birutė tells her practice of faith in the family and beyond: “*The people were praying, people prayed. There were traps in the fields. People prayed, and at home my parents were very devout*”. Her religious belief was influenced by her father's authority: “*Its already calling the Mass and Father Says: Let's go to the Church. I do not want to. [Laughs] [...] I have to go, I must listen. [laughs]*” [Birutė]. Morta's religious faith was formed in childhood through the example of the parents: “*[Father] was a very good man. Very faithful. We small children were taken to the church. We were four [...]. All were bathed, dressed, lined up, and went to the church. [...] I grew up in this very oasis. Well, goodness, extraordinary goodness spread in the family since childhood*“. The goodness, forgiveness and behavior of Morta's mother testified the religious beliefs and the moral values thus passed on: “*And my mother was wonderfully good. [...] had a very good heart. In German times they were those prisoners. Accepted Russian woman with the little ones and eat [...] together at one table. [...] I learn a lot from her. [...] she said: baby, I forgive her. If I do not forgive, God will not forgive me. [...] unspoken kindness, forgiveness [...] maybe I have had the goodness with genes, [...] I brought a lot from the family. [...] I saw how mother worked. [...] We're leaving. [...] It seems to me that I now see her standing at the garten, hand wobble until we disappear from the horizon, disappear. Well, that feeling of warmth. That feeling of love. It remains very deep in the heart*” [Morta].

Peter's first memories relate to the parents and the walk of the church in childhood: “*When we walked from the church. [...] I was three or four years of age. [...] As a movie I see how that hat fell, carried away by the wind and I started to blubber. [...] Dad put me on his hands. Mom went by. We had to go 0.5 km to church. I got baptized there*”. The man took the moral values and prayer practices from his parents: “*[Parents] were also religious, walked to church. [...] Honest ones*” [Petras]. John's faith was formed in childhood through the religious education received from his older sister: “*If you believe in God, [...] everything depends on how [...] the priests taught, as the parents teach, as they taught to the first Holy Communion. [...] My sister taught us [...] She is older than me*“. Stefa's religious faith was nurtured by parents, school, and church: “*according to tradition, we followed this, [...] we were not lazy to walk those 9 km to the church from there, being small and adolescent, and through the snow*” [Stefa]. The woman's non superstitious understanding of the faith was influenced by her father's attitude and relationship with the priest in childhood: “*There was no superstition that you would not step there, or something. [...] Maybe his father's merit. He had a great deal of communication with such a priest [...] my parents lived there when he built the [name of the locality] church. [...] Also it was a big plus in my life probably, I remember it, of course, he stroked me and blessed, he healed people with herbs. [...] My father took all the*

knowledge out of that priest traveling with him when he was working. [...] Probably the belief [...]. I think, it's such a spiritual relationship“. The first teachers left a significant footprint in her life: “People are very good all the lives and those teachers were more spiritual in the past. [...] my primary teachers were very good“ [Stefa].

The origins of the religious faith of all the participants of the study were formed in childhood, but had different tendencies of expression in the course of life. The trajectories of religious faith among the participants at different age stages is presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Expression of religious faith in the course of life among the participants of the study

No	Name	Stages of Life				Nature of Religious Faith
		Childhood	Youth	Middle age	Old age	
1.	Anelè	*	neglected	rediscovered	*	wavy, neglected, rediscovered
2.	Stefa	*	neglected	rediscovered	*	wavy, neglected, rediscovered
3.	Birutè	*	*	*	*	stable
4.	Petras	*	hidden	hidden	rediscovered	wavy, hidden, rediscovered
5.	Jonas	*	neglected	rediscovered	*	wavy, neglected, rediscovered
6.	Morta	*	*	*	*	stable
7.	Ona	*	*	*	*	stable

Source: according to research data

Religious Faith in the course of life reflecting the faith in older people in the perspective of their life is highlighted during the analysis. The trajectories of religious faith are distinguished: stable, wavy (neglected, hidden and rediscovered). Stable faith describes a constant, low-changing faith and its significance in the life course of older people, i.e., from childhood to the old age. The woman admits that faith was constant from childhood to the old age. A woman during her studies at the city often visited the church and listened to the priestly sermons: “all the time with the church, with religion, with faith. [...] Well, I had such connection during lifetime “[Morta]. In her youth, a woman married a believing man who had an important faith and fostered his family. In the course of life, Morta's faith was not influenced by Soviet ideology, although it was difficult for her to reconcile with the prevailing ideology. She remained faithful to the truths of her faith: “They wanted me to join the political party, when I was a deputy for extra-curricular work.” Well I say: only with my husband, if I will separate, only then can I join, and in no way does he let me join the political party. I already resisted, I excused“ [Morta]: and the secret practices of the faith: “We went to such church [...] to other parishes. [...] we hid and listened to the Mass. [...] I had a scarf like a grandma, so how would I go, no one would recognise me“ [Morta]. The woman invited by the pastor began to take part in the activities of the prayer groups, and then to lead: “[The priest]

began to establish prayer groups, [...] he then led one group, the other. Then he says, you are better than me and he left me. I have been leading this for many years and leading a group of prayers“ [Morta]. The group of prayers is very important to woman, although she is currently unable to engage the activities because of age and health. Ona took religious faith from her family since childhood. The woman admits that faith is an important part of life and has not undergone any changes: *“No extraordinary things have happened in my life. Nothing has changed. I have not been distorted anywhere out of the Ten Commandments of God; I thank God“* [Ona]. Trust in God's work is part of the participant's and her family's belief: *“You [God] know, thou hast ordained our lives. We never think otherwise in our home“* [Ona]. In childhood and youth she was surrounded by Catholic Lithuanian literature. The woman was studying in a Catholic gymnasium: *“No other school my father ... in any way ... no, no thought, would not allow to go“* [Ona]. After marriage, her relationship with her husband was marked with moral obligations: *“That's how the heart trembles that I can't. (silence) That evening after the wedding, he says to me: "We are still young, we will not raise children for five years." "Okay," I say. Then he says, "If there were such a fate in our life that we would be separated, we would be loyal." I say again, "good." Then ... The third it was: "Let's start this evening with novena of heart of Jesus". I can't forget these things (silence)“* [Ona]. „*Tas areštavimas, tas išvežimas, tie kalėjimai...*“ [Ona]. [Ona]. After interrogation she went to her sister to the monastery because she needed a shelter: *“She [sister] went out when she was eighteen years old. [...] "Could you accept me?" She says: [...] you want to come here? [...] She went to the Abbess. She read, read, and said no word. Okay, she may come. That's how I went with an empty bag“* [Ona]. In her job, the woman reconciled her duties with the religious beliefs and service to the sick: *“I worked in the hospital ... the church was there also. [...] And when I was working on Sundays, I brought the priest ... (silence) the patients were happy. [...] One even kissed me cudding. "It will be easy to die now". Patients were waiting for me“* [Ona]. Ona (born 1927) and Morta (b. 1932), were the oldest woman who participated in the study. They spent their childhood in the period of Lithuanian independence, when their religious beliefs were freely available. They describe themselves both as religious and believer. Their religious faith have remained stable in the course of life. For Birute, faith is stable and little changing in the course of life. She continued to practice her faith in childhood. She went to church in her youth and mature age „*All the time we were going to church, all the time. [...] when there is nothing to do, I go to the church on ordinary day. I can say that I always went. And in our youth, we have been going for feast days. [...] Youth Mass was, and the ball was. [...] It was fun“* [Birutė]. It is true that previously practiced religious faith was little understood: *“So earlier the Mass was in Latin. Yes. Well, you read missiol from the books. Well, you read something. Well, you don't understand anything here, and you don't know what that priest is doing* [Birutė]. Now a woman is taking part in Sunday worship, in prayer groups, praying for her

children and unbelievers: *"I have to pray [for the children] [...] to live as believers as Catholics. [...] [laughs]. I really took them to church and they sat down there on such platform there. [...] Then don't want to "[Birutë]; "We are going every Sunday. Well, no one here goes. [...] It's too far [Birute].* Ona and Birute have a special influence on religious beliefs as a result of the dominant father's behavior.

Wavy religious faith defines a vague, fragmented faith or a change in its meaning in the course of life. It was neglected, hidden and rediscovered in the course of life. The neglected religious faith refers to the practice of non-practice or passive practice at a certain stage. In the life stories there are stages when participants did not attach particular importance to religious faith in household affairs: work, leisure or family. Stefa admits that she was away from the church because of the problems in the family: *"I have to say honestly when my sons have grown up, and for a while I was not for will, but for conditions brought away from the church. [...] for a while I was far away [Stefa].* The weakening of a woman's religious faith was due to a historical period, a lack of education and literature: *"And what is now being taught in literature is nothing. [...] The pastor did not teach us"* [Stefa]. However, according to her, the faith was not influenced by Soviet ideology, because the participant did not belong to any party: *"I did not belong to any party. I wasn't humble. One party up there (laughs)"* [Stefa]. Jonas's religious belief in the course of life is fragmentary: *"Earlier I went both, and I did not go to the church and to the confession".* The man is open: there was no faith in youth: *„needed to do all kinds of fools. And now everything is different. [...] There were parties. And at first I was an idle. [laughs]"* [Jonas]. Anelë does not mention religious belief in her youth. At this stage, work and leisure take the first place: *"I was working in a cotton factory and there was a dance group [...]. That's what I danced in that group. We travelled a lot everywhere. There were many concerts. [...] It was very interesting and very good"* [Anelë].

Hidden religious faith characterizes the denial of religious faith and their secret practice because of social fear in life. Petras' religious faith in the course of life is fragmented. He took over the faith from his parents. In his youth and in the mature age, the man chose a double faith: *"I thought to someone to persecute you to fool you. I was still both a Komsomol and a Communist, but I believed and I walked to the church. Although it was very secret ... (very quietly)"* [Petras]. Man sought recognition in his work, and he denied faith because of his social fear of being marginalized or punished: *"I did not want to be perverted so that I would be seen as not being human (very quiet). It was hard for such people to live [...] Mostly because of religion. [...] you know, these people were being persecuted. With them cruel ... (very quiet)"* [Petras]. „Soviet ideology influenced the faith and evolution of the man: *"You know, that propoganda, that ideology could have persuaded you. You are a good example"* [Petras]. They both took part in party activities, but they secretly practiced their Christian faith: *"And how many times the wife went [to the church],*

and she was the party member when they have learned that she was going to church, she said: I have to find out how they live in the church. Then they left her alone“ [Petras].

Rediscovered religious faith describes the changes of faith and the discovery of meaning in a certain stage of life. Anelè shared that her religious faith was affected by survivors' loss and special experience: *“The husband died. [...] I have also worried and cried. At last I had a dream where he said I wouldn't cry“ [Anelè].* The woman experienced a religious experience to see Mary and Jesus: *“It seemed I was sleeping, but I didn't sleep. But it flew so beautifully. The great light. As if framed picture of Mary and the picture of Jesus. But it is like a flowing light, but such a light, such bright, beautiful rays“.* [Anelè]. She shared her experience with the nuns and expressed her doubts about the reaction of others: *“maybe the women believed. [...] to tell someone else, maybe they would say something with the mind“ [Anelè].* Such an experience in a mature age helped to rediscover faith. Stefa admits that she was removed from the church because of family worries: *“I have to say honestly that my sons grew with a year difference between them, and for a while I was not for will, but for conditions away from the church [...] for a while I was distant from church [...] some sort of breakout“ [Stefa].* The weakening of a woman's religious faith was due to a historical period, a lack of education and literature: *“And what is now being taught in literature, it was nothing. [...] The pastor did not teach us completely“ [Stefa].* However, according to her, the faith was not influenced by Soviet ideology, because the participant did not belong to any party: *“I did not belong to any party. I wasn't humble. One party is up there (laughs)“ [Stefa].* When Independence was restored, more knowledge and a better understanding of faith, various literature became available *“the independence began, more literature appeared. Maybe Mary's radio with whom I am already now maybe for 12 years now. [...] Now I am conscious that it seems to me (laughs) now; now, of course, there are no limits to development. But all these concepts are understandable. That faith is much deeper“ [Stefa].* Thus, the woman has rediscovered and deepened her faith in the mature age. Petras is rediscovering religious faith in old age. This was influenced by service and communion with the monks *“it is mostly **here** when I lived in a monastery. Most this touched me here. That faith, that communication with the brothers, with the priests“ [Petras].* Jonas's religious faith in the course of life is fragmentary: *“earlier I went to church, than didn't go, than had a confession and for some time didn't have“.* The man is open: there was no faith in youth: *“all kinds of fools were done. And now everything is different. [...] Needed to to make fools. ... Understand smth a bit...festivals. And at the beginning I had nothing to do. [laughs]“ [Jonas].* In the mature age, the example of faith he takes from his wife and her parents: *“The mother-in-law and the wife was everything to me. [laughs] [...] They were very believing. [...] They prayed day and night. They were sitting here. I carried them to the church when I could with a car [...] Every Sunday they traveled by themselves. [...] And my wife believes more than I do“ [Jonas].*

In summary, it can be said that all older people under investigation have the basis of religious faith obtained in childhood, which later differently evidences in their course of life: for some it remains stable, for others it is wavy, unfolding as neglected, hidden or rediscovered in middle or late age.

4. Discussion

This study is limited to a case study examining the phenomenon of religious faith in the sample of older people practicing Catholics. The analysis of the study helped to answer the question of how the religious faith of the elderly evidences in their course of life. The participants of the study are characterized by the basis of religious faith in childhood, formed by various people, such as: relatives, teachers, and priests, historical and cultural environment. They took not only the attitude of the Church, but also moral values and prayer practices. Religious faith was fostered by parents, school, and the Church. Parents were the first educators of faith who focused on morals, passed on the values, morals, and behaviors (Linardakis, et al., 2015). Although the origins of religious faith of all older people were formed in childhood, they had different tendencies of expression in the course of life. They have a stable or wavering religious faith. The findings of the study confirmed that religious faith develops in the course of life (Shaw, Gullifer, & Wood, 2016), and this is a life-long process that takes place in an environment of social life, even in old age (Suchomelová, 2016). One cannot expect a natural “*quality of faith*” only by the age, because a person is experiencing stagnation, regression or crisis and can make significant progress in overcoming these experiences (Suchomelová, 2016, p. 49). Stable religious faith is a constant and little-changing faith in the lives of the elderly. Constant religious practice, marriage with a believer and with the man of the same moral values, engagement in a religious community, and service, which provides the opportunity to deepen their faith have helped to maintain a stable faith for the elderly. The joys and difficulties of life are related to the closest and the most significant environment (Suchomelová, 2016). Possible obstacles to religious faith were the following: lack of religious education, Soviet ideology and Soviet regime (interrogation, detention).

Trust in the truths of belief, disobedience with Soviet ideology, secret practice of religious faith, use of religious things and the relationship with priests who spread the truths and examples of religion and belief and their examples helped to overcome these obstacles of life. The life stories show that religious faith has remained a core value throughout their lives. The faith taken from the parents was further nurtured in the context of the church institution. The religious faith of two women with a stable faith was deeply advanced, but its understanding and ability to verbalize were poor. Reflection plays a major role in recognizing the relationship with the universe and God (Trimakas, 1998). Historical and cultural periods may have influenced the stability of religious faith

for senior participants who describe themselves as religious and believers. Their origins of faith were formed during the period of Lithuania's independence, when it was possible to freely confess their religious worldview. The strong influence of the father played a special role in the formation of a stable religious faith. Wavy religious faith is an unclear, fragmented faith and its changing meaning in the course of life. Its development was influenced by the following obstacles: the double relationship with faith, Soviet ideology, domestic worries, lack of religious education, and the contemporary period of the Soviet Union. Wavy religious faith can evidence as neglected, hidden or rediscovered faith in a particular stage of life. The fragmentation of this faith is revealed in the youth stage. In some people's life stories, religious faith is missing at this age, as the focus was on the other important values: household, family, or work. This may be influenced by the identity and individuality that develops in youth (Erikson., 2004), and the related pursuit of independence, internal resistance to others and concern for oneself (Trimakas, 1998). Such egocentricity and individualism, manifested in a strong tendency to self-acknowledgment, may hinder the development of faith (Ruemke, 1962). Comparing stable and wavy religious faith, they are different from the basic personal values. For some participants, religious faith remained the fundamental value of life throughout their lives; for others, it was replaced by other core values at certain ages.

The hidden religious faith expresses the denial of religious beliefs and their secret practice in the course of life. In literature there is a phenomenon of inner duality, characterized by internal division, decomposition, and attraction to opposing things (Trimakas, 1998; Ruemke, 1962), which can lead to hidden religious faith. Human duality influences human faith (Trimakas, 1998). The analysis of the study revealed that there was a twofold relationship with faith in youth and mature age: a person was involved in party activities but practiced his religious beliefs secretly. He sought recognition in his work, and denied his faith publicly because of his social fear of being marginalized or punished. Hidden faith was influenced by internal reactions to the environment. The development of religious faith can be hindered by the following internal obstacles: passivity, fear of humiliation and death, reluctance to experience pain and lack of will (Ruemke, 1962), which are the cause of inner duality in personal faith (Trimakas, 1998). They are the emotional and character weaknesses that are hindered by the ability to respond and make a personal relationship with God (Trimakas, 1998). For these reasons, further evolution of the faith stops. Although this reflects a dual and subtle state of personality, as Trevi (1992) states, *“There is no belief without an element of unbelief, and there is no unbelief in which there would be no temptation to believe”¹*. Soviet ideology has been able to exert some influence on the evolution of their religious beliefs through punishment and encouragement for some individuals.

¹ Ref. Trimakas, 1998, p.112

Rediscovered religious faith describes the changes in the faith of the participants and the discovery of the meaning in a certain stage of life. Older people are rediscovering faith in a mature age or old age. The reasons for the discovery of religious faith are a special mystical experience, an example of significant individuals, and the spread of religious education, determined by the peculiarity of the period of independence. The special mystical experience that reveals the spiritual experience of the Self is significant to the religious belief of individuals. The participants of the study tell religious experiences to see Mary and Jesus and a living glimpse of Mary from the painting. They experience a meaningful and peaceful personal relationship with the saints. An important mystical experience has strengthened their religious beliefs and deepened their relationship with God. This helped to overcome the crisis (interrogation, loss, depression), improved psychological condition, gave strength and peace. Special experience is characterized by intuitive, cosmic and mystical experience (Trimakas, 1998). It is important for a person to believe when they feel and understand, and then willingly endorse and rationally explain their experience (Trimakas, 1974). The findings of the study are confirmed and complemented by Klara's example, which has experienced a particular experience during the first confession, where she has experienced a joy and meaningful relationship with the being: *“And then - as of now - it's hard for me to explain what has happened ... it is easiest to say that suddenly something was here. It was a pure separation of my soul, like a shining sword cut through a silk veil. [...] it was not in my mind, in my heart, or in blood circulation. But what it was, what I knew, it was something - who gave me the infinite meaning. [...] I was filled with joy”* (Luca, 1949, p. 224)². These special experiences, as spiritual experiences, create an objective reality that has a personality transformation effect on an experienced person (James, 1982). Such experiences are indelibly immersed in the consciousness of the person and the depth of the person (Trimakas, 1998).

5. Conclusions

The religious faith of the elderly is manifold in their life. For these individuals, there is a fundamental basis for religious faith in childhood, formed by various individuals, such as: relatives, teachers, priests, and the historical and cultural environment. Older people have a stable or wavy religious faith. Stable religious faith is a constant, little-changing belief in the lives of the elderly. Wavy religious faith is a fragmentary belief and its changing meaning in life. At a certain stage of life, it may appear as neglected, hidden or rediscovered religious faith. As the study is qualitative, it brings new insights for further research, and encourages the search for new methods to explore the religious faith of older people in other cultures or religions.

² Ref.Trimakas, 1998, p. 60.

A deeper understanding of religious faith in the course of life is valuable for professionals working with these individuals in social services, long-term care, educational institutions and associations for elderly. The findings of the study are adapted and integrated into counseling, psychotherapy and psychosocial and spiritual interventions of older people. They are useful for professionals working with clients of this age, i.e., psychologists, psychotherapists, pastors and health care professionals. Because religious faith is relevant to health care (Wong, 1998), it is therefore important to educate health professionals on this topic, as this can help to better develop individual health care and meet the needs of older people. In the future it is worth exploring the religious faith and evolution of different generations (grandparents - grandchildren) to understand how religious faith and identity are formed and transmitted in families. This would help to better understand the religious faith and peculiarities of different generations.

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